

THE NEAR EAST'S COMMUNIST-FASCIST FRONT

An Ominous Alliance Against Israel and the West

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NOT altogether unexpectedly, recent events in Persia, Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere have advertised the Middle East as one of the major troubled areas of the world. But what has been a surprise is the united front the Communists in all these countries have made with extreme reactionary nationalism. This development has left most Western observers baffled, even though it has supplied them with further evidence—unfortunately more telling at home than in the East—for their argument that Communism has more in common with fascism than with democracy. Nor has the West yet been able to find the right strategy and tactics with which to cope with the new situation.

Yet this is not the first time that Communists have joined hands with the far right. One ought to remember how they cooperated with reactionary nationalism in Germany in attacking the Weimar regime in 1923 and, again, in 1932; and how Stalin signed a pact with Hitler in 1939, and the consequent anti-war campaign in the United States in which Communist voices blended with those of reactionaries from the isolationist quarter.

There is one very important difference, however, in the present case. In the past,

THE startling turn of events in the Middle East, of which this article informs us, is a matter spelled out in flaming headlines in Cairo, Damascus, Bagdad, Jerusalem, and elsewhere; but the portentous story and the complex forces behind it are known only in inadequate outline to the West. MARK ALEXANDER, who lives in the Middle East and has a first-hand knowledge of the developments he here reports on, contributes frequently to the *Twentieth Century* (England), the *New Leader*, and other periodicals. For reasons that will be obvious to anyone who knows that part of the world, he has asked us not to identify him further.

Communist collaboration with the right was always regarded by the Communists themselves as only a temporary, largely informal expedient. Today, on the contrary, it has become the official, consistent, and long-term policy of the Communist parties in all "colonial and dependent countries." What was once an empirical, tactical measure is now a part of ideology grounded on countless quotations from Stalin and Mao Tse-tung. The basis for this change has, moreover, been in existence, in ideology itself, for quite a while. In fact, the present Communist line in Asia amounts to a return to the original thesis on the course to be adopted by Communists in colonial, dependent, and backward countries as it was stated at the famous conference in Baku in 1920 attended by bigwigs of the new Bolshevik regime and Communist-inclined delegates from the Eastern countries—and as it was stated again at the less famous but equally important Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921. This thesis, repeated frequently by Lenin and Stalin, was originally set forth by an Indian, M. N. Roy, who has since renounced his adherence to Communism.

Roy asserted that the bourgeoisie in most Asian countries were split into a revolutionary wing, on one side, and a conciliatory, or compromising, wing, on the other. The latter consisted, in one of Stalin's less happy formulations, mainly of big capitalists or "compradors" (a term coined in China to designate the prosperous agents and employees of foreign governments and commercial firms), while the revolutionary wing was headed by the spokesmen of the lower middle class. In a frequently quoted speech delivered to the students of the University of the Peoples of the East in Moscow in 1925, Stalin said: "The Communist party can and must enter into an open bloc with the revolutionary

wing of the bourgeoisie in order, after having isolated the compromising national bourgeoisie, to lead the vast masses of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie in the fight against imperialism."

THE present Communist policy of collaboration with right-wing extremists in the Middle East is clearly based on this original directive of Stalin's. Mulla Kashani in Persia, Ma'arouf Dualibi in Syria, and Ahmed Hussein in Egypt are regarded as spokesmen of the "uncompromisingly anti-imperialist" lower middle class, or petty bourgeoisie, while the governments of their respective countries are supposed to be dominated in varying measure by the "pro-imperialist" upper bourgeoisie.

This confronts us with an interesting situation: "subjectively," i.e., in their aims and program, all three of the above-named Arab politicians were, or are, fascists, and led parties that were financed in the past by Nazi Germany; "objectively," however—that is, in the eyes of the Politburo—what determines the essential political character of any person anywhere is not his ideology but his position vis-à-vis Western "imperialism." The fact that these three Arabs are against it makes them at once eligible for aid from Communists, all other considerations being of lesser or no importance.

Once upon a time Roy's thesis was interpreted and implemented differently, however. In the 1930's the Communists thought that leftist and liberal forces alone should be backed in the colonial East—the left wing of the Wafd in Egypt, and of the Istiqlal in Iraq, the Congress socialists in India, and so forth. But far-reaching changes have ensued since then that affect the very essence of the Soviet regime, not merely its foreign policy. The terms "left" and "right" have become largely meaningless so far as Stalinism is concerned, and Soviet foreign policy now adheres to only one single principle, which is to do everything possible to promote and extend Soviet power. All this has had its effect on the old Marxist-Leninist dogmas about revolution in the colonial East.

According to these, the upsurge of the hunger-driven masses expressed through class warfare was to power the nationalist struggle for liberation from colonial domination in the East. There were many reasons, in theory at least, to justify this view: social contrasts and antagonisms were much sharper there than in the West, what with mass poverty, disease, oppressive taxation, absentee landlordism, growing unemployment in the cities, and many of the other conditions that ordinarily breed social unrest, agrarian uprisings, and more or less violent popular movements.

But history in the Middle East did not follow the prescribed course. Agrarian revolts did not occur as expected in Egypt and Iraq, where a few persons own most of the land, but they did break out in Syria, where the concentration of landownership is much less advanced. Cyprus is certainly not the poorest country of the Middle East, and it knows much less social inequality than do other Asian countries, yet it has, relatively, the strongest Communist party, with Communist mayors in most of its towns. In Israel (for reasons which cannot be gone into here) the Communists have never received more than 3 to 4 per cent of the Jewish vote, even in industrial centers like Haifa and Tel Aviv, but they did get 50 per cent or more in agricultural Nazareth among the Arabs.

Whatever headway Communists have made as a party in the Middle East in recent years occurred only when and where they appeared as a radical nationalist, not a radical socialist, party. In contests against parties more extreme than themselves in their nationalism, the Communists have always been defeated. The recent Iranian elections show again how much more effective nationalism in its most extreme form is than socialism in the Middle East. Whatever one's opinions about the real character of the Tudeh party, its program was much more realistic, in social and economic terms, than that of Mossadegh's National Front, which amounted to nothing but a few general phrases. Nevertheless, Mossadegh was able to defeat it with a few nationalist slogans, and Tudeh ended up

far behind his National Front in the recent elections.

All this has convinced the Russians that nationalism, not socialism, not even agrarian revolution, is the main political force in the Middle East, regardless of Marxist theory. It may be different in fifty years, but the political necessities of the present and the near future have to be dealt with first. And so the Soviets, *mirabile dictu*, now let themselves be much less hampered in evaluating the Asian situation by what Marx, Lenin, and Stalin wrote than are many non-Marxist observers, who still put the main emphasis on economic and social issues.

TYPICAL of the Communists' new line is the common front they have made with the Islamic "Socialist" Front in Syria, and with Ahmed Hussein's "Socialist" party in Egypt.

The Syrian party, which has changed its name several times in recent years, developed out of the Moslem Brotherhood, and is led by Professor Ma'arouf Dualibi, Sheik Mustafa Saba'i, and Mohammed Mubarak. Dualibi, a professor of law, went fascist in the late 30's, and visited Berlin in 1941 as a guest of the Nazi Foreign Office. For a time he served as the ex-Mufti's political secretary, arranging his famous "escape" from France to Cairo after the end of World War II. In April 1950 Dualibi stated to a correspondent of *Al Misri*, the Cairo newspaper, that he favored an Arab-Soviet agreement, and he has remained since then the chief Syrian advocate of a Soviet orientation. He has also taken an active and prominent part in Stalin's "world peace movement" in the Middle East, and as a sponsor member of that movement he signed the appeal for the international economic conference held this year in Moscow.

Dualibi was a minister in various Syrian governments during 1950 and 1951, becoming prime minister-designate in November 1951, only to be arrested soon after the attempted coup d'état by Colonel Shishakli. The following is a typical quotation from his paper in Damascus, *Al Manar el Gedi*:

"The Syrian government should take action at once to liberate the Syrian economy from the rule of world Jewry. American Jews have undermined our economy by supplying bad seeds to our cotton-growers, and Jewish industrialists from America are trying to destroy our local manufacturers by selling cheap clothes, their intention being to cause mass unemployment. . . ." This appeared on December 30, 1951.

Mohammed Mubarak's background is quite similar. Sheik Saba'i, on the other hand, is an orthodox Moslem dignitary who advocates the most reactionary measures in domestic politics—for example, the exclusion of women from public and political life. In foreign policy, however, which is the only important test for the Communists, he is as ardently pro-Soviet as Dualibi. At a press conference in May 1950, when asked whether his Soviet sympathies were merely an answer to "Anglo-American pressure" on the Arabs, or whether they were more deeply founded, he replied: "We will fight the West and cooperate with the East even if that pressure should be discontinued." Asked about his attitude towards the project for establishing "Islamistan," a union of all the Moslem countries, with or without an Islamic-Catholic alliance at the same time, he answered: "In the past I used to be one of the proponents of these plans, but I have now realized that their purpose is to serve imperialist interests, and I will in the future favor such projects only if they are not directed against Russia" (Damascus *Al Ansha*, May 23, 1950).

The reactionary, even semi-fascist, character of the Islamic Socialist Front has never been seriously doubted (though one of its leaders declared the other day that it was really a "Communist drink in an Islamic cup"), but this has not interfered in the least with its close collaboration with the Communists over the last two years. The Front has considerable influence among the peasants and the urban lower middle class, and half the deputies to the Syrian parliament from the capital city belong to it. It is due mainly to the Front's activity that crypto-

Communist publicity campaigns like the various "peace appeals" have been so successful in Syria.

THE case of Ahmed Hussein in Egypt is, if possible, even more clear-cut. He founded fascism in Egypt in the 1930's, his "Green Shirts" (later called *Misr el Fatat*—"Young Egypt") resembling the Brown Shirts of Berlin and the Black Shirts of Rome in everything but color. Financed by the Axis, Ahmed Hussein continued his pro-fascist activities after the outbreak of World War II, and was arrested by the Egyptian authorities. He reappeared on the political scene only in August 1949, at which time he announced in *Ahram*, leading Arab newspaper of Egypt, the founding of a new organization called the Egyptian Socialist and Democratic party. About a year later, when this party held its first congress, it became obvious that it was only the old *Misr el Fatat* under a new name. On this occasion Ahmed Hussein told his followers that from now on they would have to look to Moscow instead of Berlin and Rome for their instructions: "A pact with Russia," he said, "has become an absolute necessity." At the same time he stressed the national-socialist character of his party, which was not to be dependent on any socialist parties abroad.

Soon after, Ahmed Hussein was named to the executive of the Egyptian "peace" movement. He took a prominent part in the anti-imperialist demonstrations on August 26, 1951, in Cairo, which had among its slogans: "Down with the Point Four program!" and "Down with dollar imperialism—long live the Soviet Union!" That same evening, when the very biggest of the demonstrations was staged, he was one of the main speakers, along with Yussuf Hilmi, the Communist secretary of the "peace" movement in Egypt. Meanwhile his party's weekly, *Al Ishtirakie*, called for a pogrom against the Jews in Egypt and against foreigners in general. Later *Al Ishtirakie* was banned by the Wafd government, which certainly could not be accused of having exerted itself, as a rule, to protect the lives and property of the members of the

ethnic and religious minorities under its rule. Copts, Jews, Armenians, Greeks—they had all been the objects of inflammatory abuse in Ahmed Hussein's paper.*

During the recent conflict with the British troops in the Suez area, Ahmed Hussein, together with several Moslem Brotherhood leaders, had the main hand in forming the "liberation battalions" (*Kata'ib*); while the "black Saturday" pogrom in Cairo in January of this year was organized by Ahmed Hussein's party in collaboration with the Communists. This was originally hailed as a "mighty anti-imperialist mass demonstration" by *Pravda* (January 29), and welcomed in even more glowing terms by the editorial writer of the Communist *L'Humanité* in Paris, Pierre Courtade (January 28). Only when it was seen that the pogrom, instead of strengthening Communist influence, had caused the downfall of the Wafdist government, did the Communist spokesmen begin to criticize the "irresponsible elements that had perverted the true anti-imperialist spirit." The Russian press even charged that these elements had been in American pay, implying that the Wafdist government had therefore been powerless to

* The "national" Communist press in the Arab countries called more violently than anyone else at that time for the opening of the "second round" against Israel, using the slogans of anti-imperialism, and even the Leninist line of argument—as in the following fairly typical paragraph from *As Shark*, the mouthpiece of the Communist-nationalist front in Lebanon, on August 1, 1951: "The propagandists of John Bull and the pupils of Uncle Sam wish to tell us that Israel is a very strong and powerful country. This is not so, Israel is an American colony, created to suppress the national liberation movement in the Arab countries. Arabs in their millions will be able to liquidate the Jews even if armed with only stones and knives. The Arab people should prepare for the day of revenge that draws near. Israel will be crushed like Nazism and Fascism in the past, and it is part of our fight against the Point Four program, the Middle Eastern Command and Western imperialism in general." Another Communist-backed paper denied that there was any contradiction between Communism and the struggle against the Jews, and it referred to Stalin's famous victory speech in September 1945—"The men of my generation have waited for over forty years for this very day, victory over Japan"—and urged that the same spirit prevail in the heart of every Arab anti-imperialist.

cope with the situation. Ahmed Hussein, and several Communist leaders, were arrested immediately after the demise of the Wafdist government, and this halted their cooperation for the time being.

FURTHER examples of collaboration between Communist and reactionary could be cited from most of the other Arab countries. Thus there are the friendly relations between Hadj Amin el Husseini, the ex-Mufti of Jerusalem, and the Communists in Palestine. Hadj Amin, who has been many things during his remarkable political career, cannot be said to have ever evinced bourgeois liberal, much less leftist, inclinations. But he has been wooed by the Communists ever since he first became an important political figure on the Middle Eastern scene. When he convened the seventh Arab National Congress in Jerusalem, in 1928, he was formally welcomed by the Comintern, and he was aided and abetted during the anti-Jewish riots in 1929, and again in 1936, when he was assigned two Communist liaison officers as political advisers, Fouad Naser ("Abu Haled") and Nimr Oda. Naser was arrested by the British authorities in Palestine in 1938, but later escaped with Oda to Iraq and in 1941 participated in Rashid Ali's Nazi-fomented revolt against the pro-British regime in Baghdad. Naser was again arrested after the failure of this *Putsch*, but Oda was able to flee on a German transport plane, and he later in the year became an announcer at Nazi-directed Radio Athens.

Naser and Oda returned to Palestine after the war, and both declared *expressis verbis* that everything they had done was on Communist party instructions. Oda was expelled from the party in 1951—not, however, because of his wartime activities—at around the same time that Fouad Naser became secretary-general of the Communist party of the Hashemite kingdom of Transjordan. When he was arrested by that state's police in Amman, in December 1951, the Middle East Communists began a campaign to arouse world opinion against this "injustice," and secure the release of this "staunch fighter

against fascism and for peace" (these at least were the words used by *Kol Ha'am*, the Communist Hebrew daily in Tel Aviv).

The ex-Mufti himself, despite his sojourn in Berlin during the war and his notorious efforts on behalf of the Nazis, has never been named by Moscow as a war criminal. The Soviet press simply ignored his escape from France to the Middle East in 1946, while the Arab Communist press welcomed him home as a national hero, running his picture on their front pages. A pan-Islamic congress that took place in Karachi, in Pakistan, in 1951, was violently attacked by the Soviet papers and radio, but for some reason or other they never mentioned its chairman, who was none other than the ex-Mufti.

In Iraq, the Communists' main allies are the Istiqlal party and the "Popular United Front." The Istiqlal consists almost entirely of former pro-Nazi elements who took part in Rashid Ali's revolt in 1941. The Popular United Front is headed by Taha el Hashemi and Mushahem el Patchachi, each a former prime minister of Iraq. El Patchachi is notorious for his attacks on Jews; in a parliamentary debate in Bagdad, on April 4, 1950, he stated that "Iraqi Jews should be punished but not allowed to emigrate from the country." Both the Istiqlal and the Popular United Front have come out for neutralism, receiving in return much praise from the Communists, who proceeded to cooperate with them in the demonstrations in Bagdad on January 28, 1952, as well as on several other occasions.

TODAY the Communists collaborate with the extreme right in every Arab and Mohammedan country except Tunisia—whose national movement, the Néo-Destour, has emphatically rejected all Communist overtures. Stalinist collaboration with reactionary nationalism is, however, by no means confined to the Middle East. There is, for example, the common front in Chile between the Communists and ex-dictator Ibanez, which is paralleled elsewhere in South America. Yet it remains true that this trend on the part of the Communists has been

more striking in the Middle East than in any other area of the world.

But aren't these reactionaries afraid of being swallowed up one day by their new partners? How can they support the agents of a power that, if its rule was extended to their countries, would put an end to their own privileged economic and political positions?

It should be explained that members of right-wing extremist groups in the Middle East are not recruited, as a rule, from among the very rich, the big landowning pashas (though there are a few notable exceptions). Their members come in the main from the middle class, the professionals, and the intellectuals in the cities, and from the Moslem clergy in the small towns and country villages. The Communist leadership in the Arab and Islamic countries has a similar social composition. This middle-class intelligentsia is intensely patriotic and sees as its paramount task the execution of long overdue social reforms that would create the basis for a further political development of their backward homelands. Communist totalitarianism rightly frightens the more alert intellectuals in the West, but, in the light of the social ideas of King Farouk in Egypt, or Nuri Said of Iraq, it begins to seem the very embodiment of progress to subjects of these rulers.

THE present governments of the Arab states and their Western supporters have been either unable or unwilling to undertake the two economic steps that are most urgently necessary in the Middle East: industrialization and agrarian reform. The Communists promise that they, on the other hand, will. Under Communist domination the Arab countries would, of course, again become colonies or satellites of a great power, and imperialism would return to them in a more rationalized and streamlined, and therefore even more oppressive form; but most of the Arab intellectuals are not farsighted enough to realize this, or, if they do, they simply do not care at the present moment.

And in any case it should be noticed that Soviet and Communist propaganda in the Middle East has always emphasized the priv-

ileged position of technicians, professionals, and intellectuals in the Soviet Union. The lawyers and physicians who lead the Communist parties and the parties of the extreme right in the Arab countries have come to look upon the Soviet Union and the "popular democracies" as class states, with their ruling classes composed, not of workers and certainly not of peasants, but of professionals, technicians, and intellectuals in cooperation with the party apparatuses. This view—which appears to correspond with reality much more than do the simple-minded notions of well-meaning fellow travelers in the West—has persuaded Arab intellectuals that their personal economic and political status would not be lowered, and might even rise, under a Communist state. It was for this very reason that a majority of these intellectuals, or the previous generation of them, supported fascism in the 1930's. Liberalism and democratic socialism, which do not guarantee their personal status in the same way, have never taken firm root among them.

The Moslem clergy, it is true, has been bitterly hostile to Communism for many years, but the attitude of many among them, too, has changed lately in this respect. They have been told about the "new deal" given to religion in the Soviet Union, and although well aware that such "deals" are only tactical on the part of Communists, some Moslem dignitaries have become very optimistic about the possibility of "co-existence" with Communism. Nationalism has become part and parcel of the new Soviet ideology, whatever may have been the original intentions of Stalin and his colleagues. May it not be, they ask, that Stalin's present partial compromise with religion is only the first step towards a similarly permanent reconciliation with religion? Ought it not be expected that in another twenty years Soviet and Communist ideology will be almost as different from what it is now as the Stalinism of 1952 is from the orthodox Marxism-Leninism of the 1920's? These questions, and their implicit answers, are typical of the ideas now going through the heads of at least some of the leading Moslem clergymen.

THERE are, however, signs that tend to show that Moscow does not regard the present upsurge of extreme nationalism in the East as an unmixed blessing. For if Russia should ever gain a foothold in this region, it would have to be expected that these same forces would turn around and bitterly resist the establishment of Soviet power in the Arab world. Certainly, the Politburo does not underestimate the virulence of Arab nationalism and Islamic orthodoxy, and it has already encountered something similar to them in Soviet Central Asia. Although nationalism and Moslem revivalism have been much less widespread or pronounced in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and the other Middle Asian Soviet republics than in the Arab countries, it has taken Moscow more than twenty years to crush Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turanism there, and this region still remains the "soft underbelly" of the Communist empire.

If the Politburo has decided, nevertheless, to encourage and exploit extreme nationalism in the Middle East, and to collaborate with it, it must be on the basis of two considerations. First, that nationalism, not social reform, is far and away the main force behind anti-Westernism in that part of the world, and therefore the risk of having nationalism recoil against Soviet imperialism has to be taken if Western influence is to be eliminated. Second, Soviet territorial expansion in the direction of the Middle East is not deemed likely in the near future: it can be safely said that Moscow does not at present envisage "popular democracies" there, for, given the strong nationalist feeling in these countries, and among the leaders of their Communist parties *as well*, only direct control would suffice to keep them obedient to Moscow. Nor do the conditions exist in the Middle East for establishing a "national liberation army" on the model of China's

and winning power by a large-scale civil war; and even if these conditions did exist, Moscow would be apt to reject this solution because of past experience with countries rash enough to make their own revolutions without waiting for Soviet help.

Since total Soviet control over the Middle East would be possible only in the event of a new world war, it is likely that all its plans for armed insurrections or other steps toward revolutionary change have been put in cold storage. The program now calls for the Communist parties, in collaboration with the nationalists and the Moslem fanatics, to strengthen their positions mutually (but not too much); put pressure on their respective governments to stay neutral in the East-West conflict and, if possible, adopt a mildly pro-Soviet policy; intensify what is called the "anti-imperialist fight," and increase their nuisance value in general; but under no circumstances engage in "leftist deviations," i.e., try their luck at a revolution. The mission of the Communist parties in the Arab world is not unlike that of General Franco's fifth column in the Spanish Civil War: namely, to strike *only* when the other four columns are already on the march.

This whole program is based, however, on the assumption that the Communists, not their right-wing allies, lead and direct the "anti-imperialist struggle." The actual fact is that the Communists have everywhere remained the junior partners of the alliance; the leadership does not lie in their hands, as it is supposed to, and, instead of giving direction to the nationalist movements, their own course of action is being dictated by the initiatives of their semi-fascist allies and the Moslem Brotherhood. Recent events in Egypt and elsewhere have shown that things in the Middle East may be developing in flat contradiction to the plans and intentions of all outsiders, including the Communists.